

# Fact sheet

Source: 2007 AIDS epidemic update—regional summary

## Middle-East and North Africa

### Regional overview

- Uneven HIV surveillance systems pose challenges in determining the patterns and trends of the epidemics in many countries of this region. HIV-related information on most-at-risk groups, such as people who inject drugs, sex workers and men who have sex with men, remains limited.
- Two key factors could increase the epidemics in the region: possible HIV transmission from people who inject drugs into the broader population and the apparent increase in unprotected extramarital sex—reflected in high levels of other sexually transmitted infections in some countries.
- Although overall numbers of reported HIV cases in the region remain small, they have been increasing in several countries, partly due to expanded HIV testing efforts. One such example is **Algeria**, where reported HIV cases doubled between 2001 and 2006.
- Most HIV infections in the region are occurring in men and in urban areas—except in **Sudan**, where a more generalized epidemic is under way. In some countries the proportion of HIV-positive women is growing, as the epidemic spreads from mostly male injecting drug users and the clients of sex workers to their wives and girlfriends.
- While unprotected paid sex is a key factor in the HIV epidemics throughout the region, injecting drug use is the main route of HIV transmission in many countries, including **Afghanistan**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**, and features in the epidemics of **Algeria**, **Morocco**, the **Syrian Arab Republic** and **Tunisia**.

### Country data and trends

- **Sudan** continues to have the largest epidemic in this region, with unsafe sex between men and women the main driver.
- In **Algeria** and **Morocco**, HIV prevalence well above the estimated adult national HIV prevalence have been found among female sex workers.
- A recent study in **Egypt** found that 6% of men who have sex with men were HIV-positive, as were 9% of the same group in a 2006 study in **Sudan's** Khartoum State. Almost half (42%) of the Egyptian men and more than half (56%) of the Sudanese men in those studies said that they had engaged in commercial sex. Yet condom use during paid sex was infrequent: about one in 10 (9%) men in the Egyptian study and fewer than half of those in the Sudanese study said that they had used protection the last time they bought sex.
- Unsterile drug injecting equipment is estimated to be the primary route of transmission in **Tunisia**, where more than 80% of the 186 HIV-positive patients who enrolled in a

study at a Tunis hospital were injecting drugs. There is also potential for injecting drug related HIV outbreaks in the **West Bank** and **Gaza Strip**, where an estimated 40% of heroin users now inject the drug.

- The **Islamic Republic of Iran** has the highest HIV prevalence among injecting drug users in the region. Almost one in four (23%) male injecting drug users tested at a Tehran drop-in centre were HIV-positive, as were 15% of those who accessed other drug treatment centres in the city.

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